

DESIGNATION PROGRAM SURVEY RESULTS

Fall 2012



AGENCY OF COMMERCE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction and Methodology

This report presents results from a survey conducted by the Department of Economic, Housing and Community Development (DEHCD) at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) on the state's designation programs. The online survey was administered between September 25, 2012 and October 6, 2012. Responses to the survey will be used to re-evaluate the suite of state designations collectively known as the "Downtown Program" (Downtowns, New Town Centers, Growth Centers, Vermont Neighborhoods) and to help guide key decisions that will lead to updates and improvements to the program. The objective of the survey was to capture opinions and ideas from a wide range of stakeholders regarding:

- Importance of the program goals
- Effectiveness of the existing program
- Improvements to the designation process
- Barriers to development / redevelopment in designated centers
- Incentives and actions to achieve program goals

The survey was administered by ACCD and distributed to a number of stakeholders, including: Downtown Organizations, the Vermont Planners Association, the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, the Homebuilders Association of Northern Vermont, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the American Institute of Architects (VT), the American Society of Landscape Architects (VT), the Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Vermont Bar Association, the Preservation Trust of Vermont, Regional Development Corporations, Regional Planning Commissions, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition. In total 323 respondents participated in the survey.

The survey is part of an expanded initiative to review the state designation programs. DEHCD staff met with numerous stakeholders to seek input to inform the survey design and questionnaire.

The goal of the program review process is to draft a package of recommendations to:

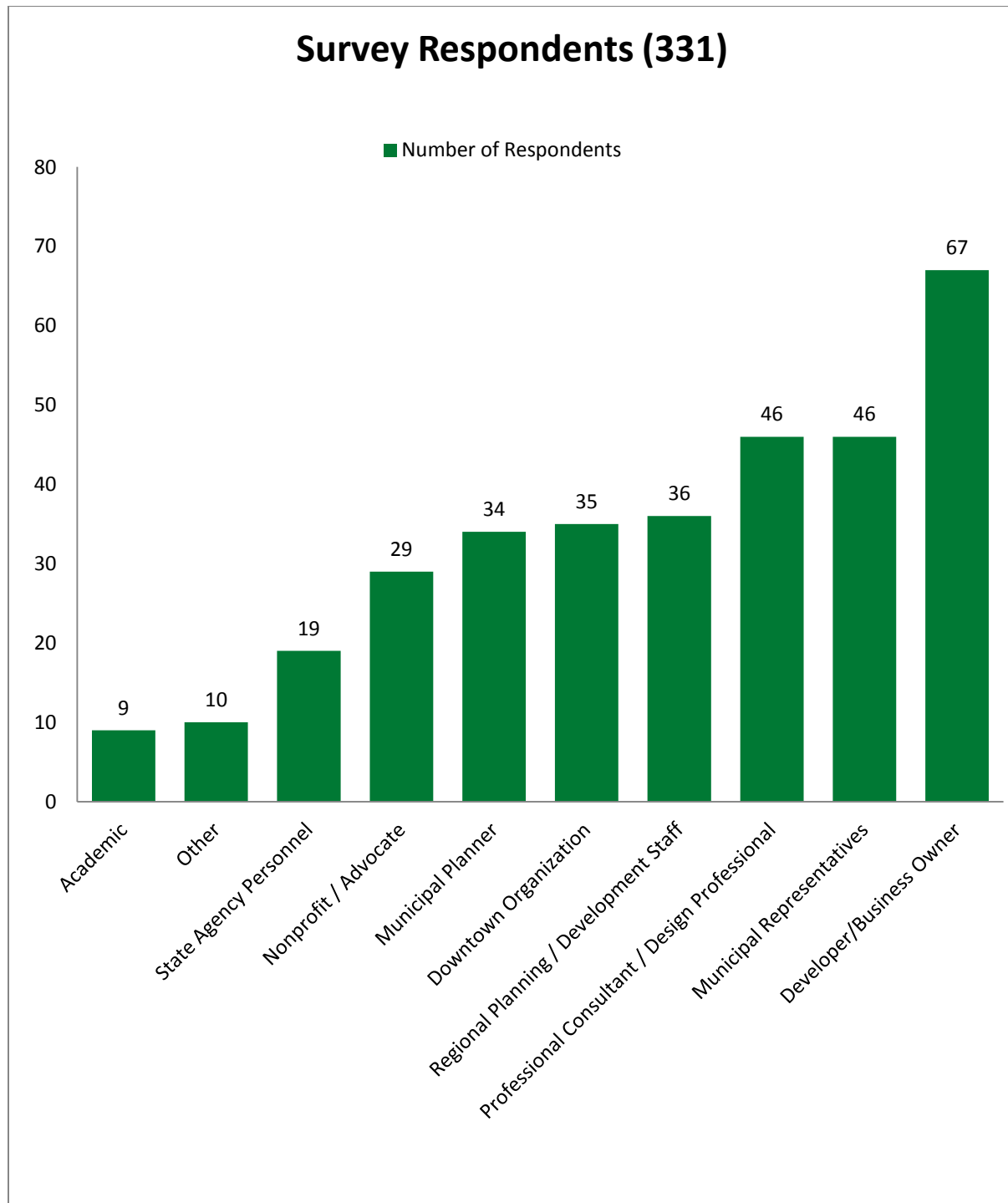
- Make the designation requirements and decision-making clear and consistent for each program
- Increase state, regional and local government collaboration to encourage compact development and
- Encourage revitalization and new development in areas that meet local, regional and state goals.

Key Findings

- All of the program's goals were highly rated as essential or very important.
 - 95% of respondents felt that promoting local businesses and a strong local economy was essential or very important; 90% felt the same about revitalizing historic centers and enhancing sense of place.
- Depending on the group of respondents and their familiarity with the programs, opinions on the effectiveness of the programs varied widely.
 - 60% of those who rated themselves "very familiar" with the Downtown Designation (n100) felt the program was either extremely effective or effective at "Revitalizing historic centers and enhancing a sense of place," compared to just 24% of those who were only "somewhat familiar" with the program (n50).
 - The Downtown and Village Center Designations were viewed more favorably than New Town Centers, Vermont Neighborhoods and Growth Centers.
- Nearly all respondents (96.7%) felt that the existing programs could benefit from changes.
 - Respondents emphasized the need to focus more on goals and results and less on "boundaries" and "checklists."
 - Downtown Board decisions were viewed as inconsistent and unpredictable by some.
 - Many had no sense of program efficacy.
- The top barrier cited for development /redevelopment in designated centers was "ease of developing rural lands as an alternative," followed by "difficulty obtaining financing" and a "property tax structure that discourages building investment." Concerns related to financing were primarily highlighted by regional planners and downtown organizations – and not by developers and landowners.
- Incentive to promote property owner investment in existing buildings (i.e. tax credits) was viewed as the most effective incentive to support program goals, followed by the prioritization of state funding toward investments into the designated areas and an increase in funding for municipalities to plan for growth and redevelopment
- The availability of expert staff to support and assist in local plan design/implementation was considered a highly effective action that would support program goals. Many also felt that Act 250 review should be exempt from designated areas with state approved master plans; however comments did note that any exemptions in Act 250 need to be balanced in other areas to better address sprawl.
- The top long term issues facing communities include:
 - The need for a mix of quality housing, especially housing that is affordable to young people earning Vermont wages.
 - Infrastructure limitations restricting growth and revitalization potential, particularly wastewater limitations for smaller communities.

Question 1 - What best describes your role?

A good diversity of respondents completed the survey and no one group was particularly over or under represented. Differences in responses across groups were as expected in some instances – and surprising in others. This report highlights some of those differences. Geographical distribution was fairly even across groups, although the majority of developers (60%) came from Chittenden County.

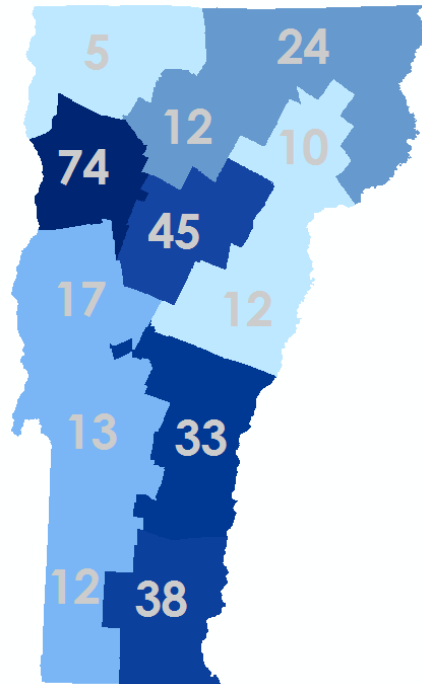


Question 2– What County are you located in?

Geographical distribution of respondents was broadly varied across the state, with a strong representation from Chittenden County. Franklin County and Grand Isle had the lowest number of respondents, with only five individuals (total) completing the survey. Responses from Essex and Orleans Counties were higher than expected (24). Opinions across the state were similar – with the exception of the issue of affordable housing highlighted to a higher degree in Chittenden County.

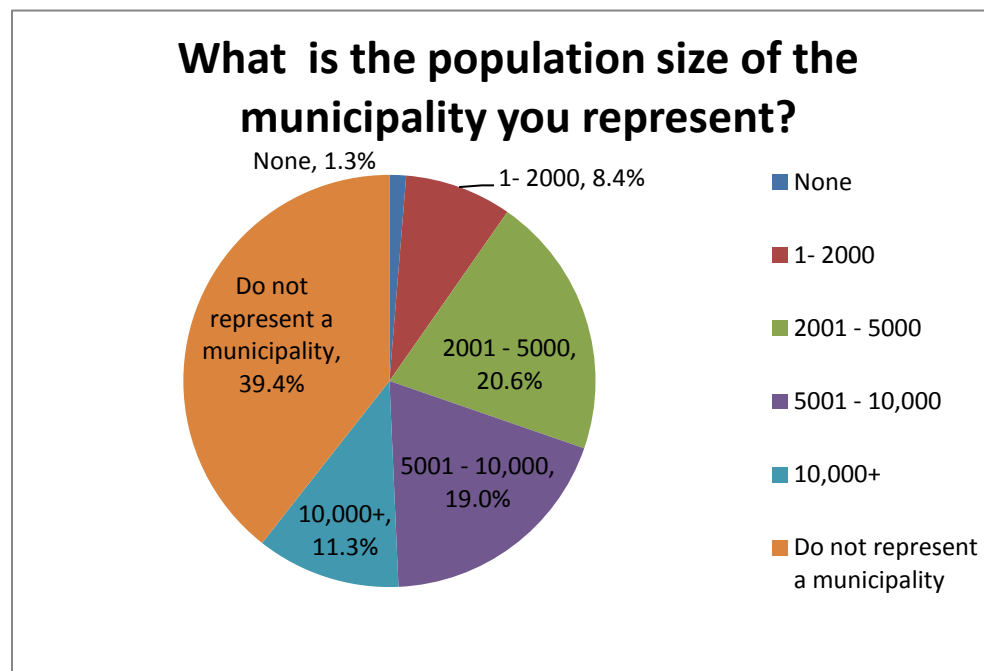
Answer Options	Response Percent	Percentage of State Population	Response Count
Addison	5.6%	5.9%	17
Bennington	3.9%	5.9%	12
Caledonia	3.3%	5%	10
Chittenden	24.3%	25%	74
Essex & Orleans	7.9%	5.4%	24
Franklin & Grand Isle	1.6%	8.7%	5
Lamoille	7.9%	3.9%	24
Orange	3.3%	4.6%	10
Rutland	4.3%	9.9%	13
Washington	14.8%	9.5%	45
Windham	12.5%	7.1%	38
Windsor	10.8%	9.1%	33

Q2. Distribution map of survey respondents



Question 3 – What is the population size of the municipality you represent?

The size of the municipalities represented in the survey was well distributed, with good representation from small, medium and large communities. There were some differences in how individuals interpreted what it meant to “represent” a municipality, with a fair number of private interests selecting a population size rather than claiming not to represent a municipality. Responses across differently sized populations were similar – one notable exception was that for municipalities of less than 2000 people, limited wastewater capacity was more likely identified as an issue of significant concern.



Question 4 – How familiar are you with each designation program?

Respondents expressed the highest degree of familiarity with the Downtown Designation and Village Center Designation, the longest standing and largest number of total designations (Village Centers 99, Downtowns 23.) Most individuals were either “somewhat” or “not at all” familiar with the Vermont Neighborhood and New Town Center Designation.

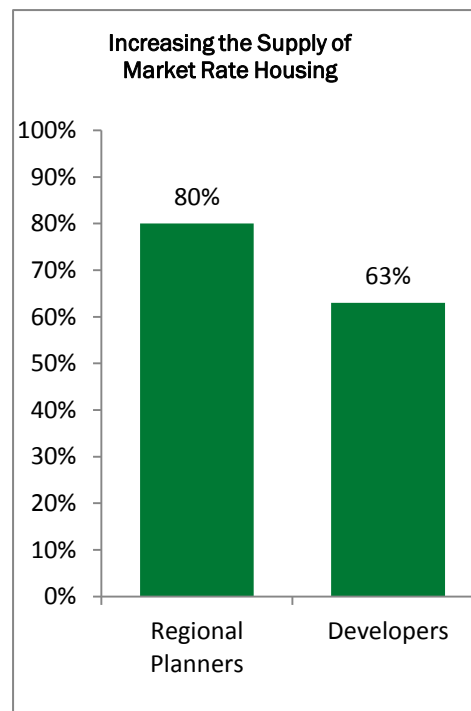
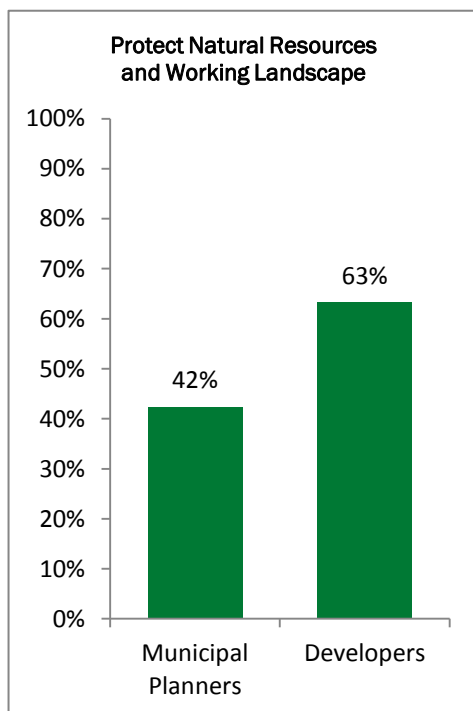
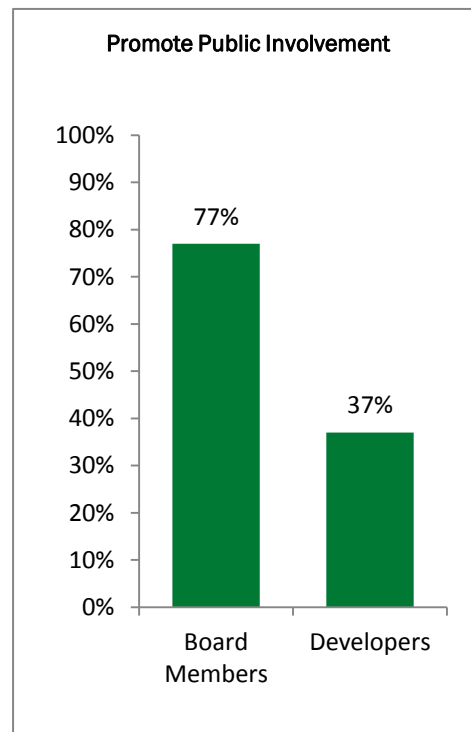
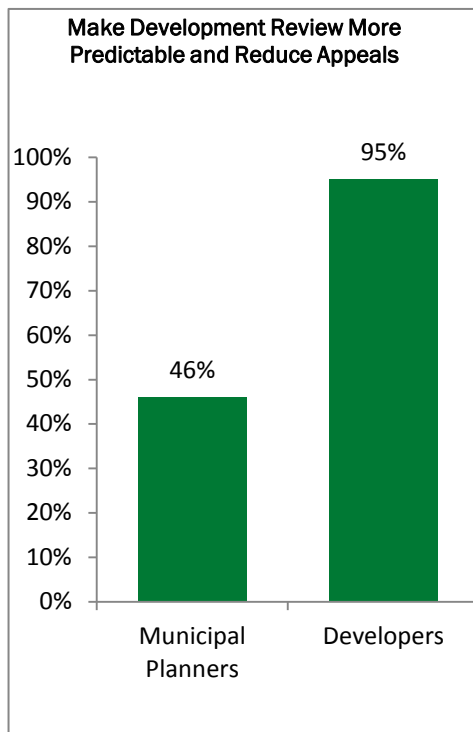
Answer Options	Very familiar	Familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
Downtown	120 (38.5%)	104 (33.3%)	69 (22.1%)	19 (6.1%)
Village Center	71 (23.7%)	93 (31.1%)	83 (27.8%)	52 (17.4%)
New Town Center	23 (7.6%)	66 (21.9%)	102 (33.9%)	110 (36.5%)
Growth Center	50 (16.5%)	91 (30.0%)	99 (32.7%)	63 (20.8%)
Vermont Neighborhoods	34 (11.3%)	63 (20.9%)	94 (31.1%)	111 (36.8%)

Question 5 – What goals of the designation program are most important to your community or organization?

Approximately one quarter of respondents chose to discontinue their participation in the survey upon review of question 5. A high percentage of non-responders identified themselves as having limited familiarity with the programs. Of those who responded to question #5, the highest rated program goal was “Promote local businesses and a strong local economy,” followed by “Revitalize historic centers and enhance sense of place”. Program goals were rated very highly – with most respondents indicating they are “essential” or “very important.” Interestingly, 63.3% of those who identified as “Developers” considered “Protect natural resources and working landscape” an “essential” or “very important goal” – compared to only 42.3% of Municipal Planners. Further, Regional Planners (72.3%) considered, “Increase supply of market rate housing in centers” more important than did Developers (63.3%). Developers put a relatively low emphasis (36.9%) on “Promoting public involvement and partnerships in decision-making” and a high emphasis (95%) on “Making development review more predictable and reduce appeals.”

Answer Options	Essential	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Don't know
Promote local businesses and a strong local economy	155 (66%)	70 (30%)	8 (3%)	2 (3%)	1 (0%)
Revitalize historic centers and enhance sense of place	123 (53%)	87 (37%)	21 (9%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)
Plan for compact, walkable communities	102 (44%)	89 (38%)	31 (13%)	8 (3%)	4 (2%)
Provide for adequate public facilities and infrastructure, such as water and sewer	92 (39%)	89 (37%)	37 (26%)	14 (5%)	3 (1%)
Protect natural resources and working landscape	76 (32%)	100 (43%)	48 (21%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)
Provide for a diversity of transportation options, such as public transit and bicycle/pedestrian facilities	76 (32%)	87 (37%)	60 (26%)	11 (5%)	1 (0%)
Make development review more predictable and reduce appeals	63 (27%)	86 (37%)	59 (25%)	19 (8%)	6 (3%)
Promote public involvement and partnerships in decision-making	54 (23%)	105 (45%)	63 (27%)	10 (4%)	2 (1%)
Increase supply of market rate housing in centers	50 (22%)	86 (37%)	66 (29%)	21 (9%)	8 (3%)
Increase supply of affordable housing	44 (19%)	79 (34%)	74 (32%)	31 (13%)	6 (3%)

Graphs: Percentages of Respondents Ranking Goals as Essential or Very Important



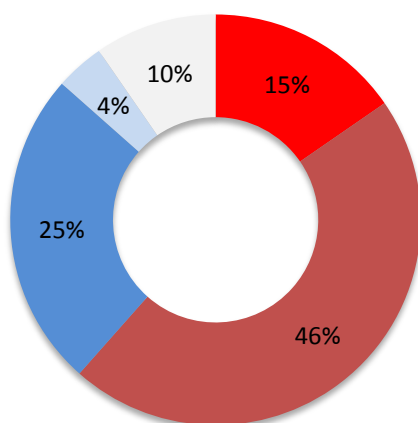
Question 6 - How effective is the existing program in helping you accomplish the following goals?

Respondents had mixed opinions regarding the effectiveness of the programs. Several interesting differences emerged when comparing different groups responses. For example, downtown business organizations' staff and business owners felt the programs were more effective than municipal officials and planners (see below.) Similarly, 60% of those who rated themselves "very familiar" with the Downtown Designation (n100) felt the program was either extremely effective or effective at "Revitalizing historic centers and enhancing a sense of place," compared to just 24% of those who were only "somewhat familiar" with the program (n50). Open-ended responses to questions throughout the survey highlighted the importance of tax-credits and the lack of effectiveness in other areas. Responses included such comments as, "Downtown and Village centers are enormously effective, Downtown tax credits are a great tool. Not sure that Growth Center Designations really address and encourage smart growth and compact settlement."

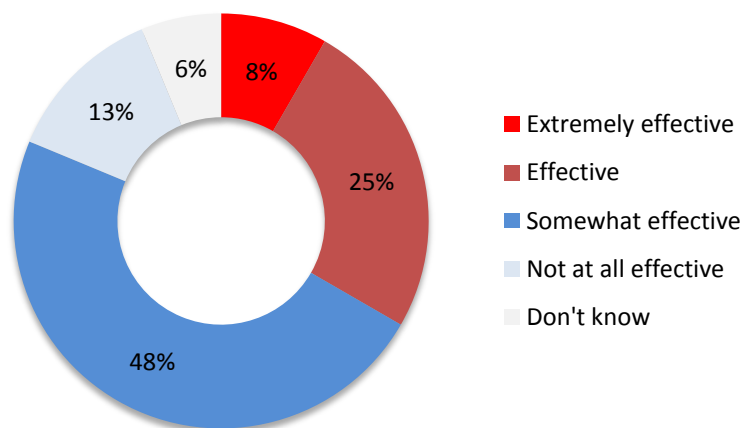
Answer Options	Extremely effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not at all effective	Don't know
Revitalize historic centers and enhance sense of place	23 (10%)	81 (35%)	92 (40%)	11 (5%)	25 (11%)
Promote local businesses and a strong local economy	16 (7%)	62 (27%)	100 (43%)	22 (9%)	32 (14%)
Promote public involvement and partnerships in decision-making	15 (6%)	53 (23%)	99 (43%)	30 (13%)	34 (15%)
Plan for compact, walkable communities	9 (4%)	57 (25%)	100 (43%)	26 (11%)	37 (16%)
Protect natural resources and working landscapes	8 (3%)	45 (19%)	94 (41%)	40 (17%)	45 (19%)
Provide for adequate public facilities and infrastructure, such as water and sewer	8 (3%)	37 (16%)	82 (35%)	43 (19%)	61 (26%)
Increase affordable housing supply	6 (3%)	37 (16%)	77 (33%)	45 (19%)	66 (28%)
Provide for a diversity of transportation options, such as public transit and bicycle/pedestrian facilities	5 (2%)	42 (18%)	98 (42%)	38 (16%)	49 (21%)
Make development review more predictable and reduce appeals	4 (2%)	25 (11%)	71 (31%)	67 (29%)	65 (28%)
Increase market rate housing supply in centers	2 (1%)	15 (6%)	83 (36%)	64 (28%)	67 (29%)

Q6. Effectiveness of programs in revitalizing historic centers and enhancing a sense of place

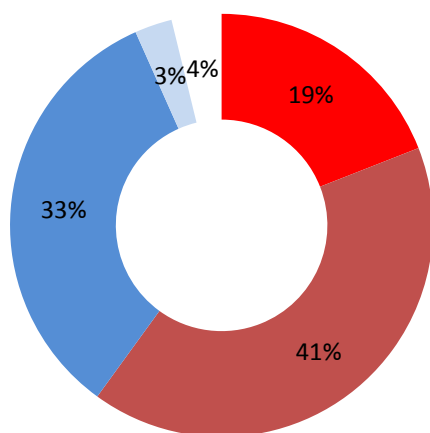
Business Owners & Downtown Organization Staff (52)



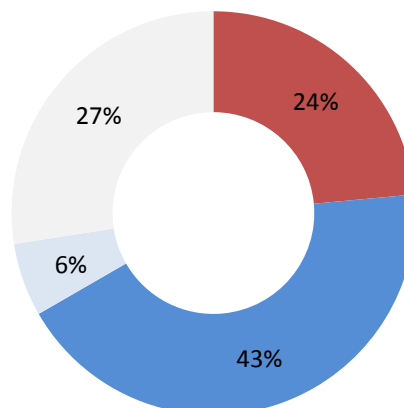
Municipal Representatives & Planners (48)



Respondents "Very Familiar" with the Downtown Designation (102)



Respondents "Somewhat Familiar" with the Downtown Designation (50)



Question 7 - Which of the following possible changes to the designation process would improve the program?

Only 3.2% of respondents felt no changes to the program were needed. Respondents support for the “possible changes” varied between 42.9% to 62.7% pending the change proposed. Open ended responses to the question (52) highlighted several points, such as:

- “Ensure product, not planning, is the most important component of the process - follow up is critical after designation.”
- “I feel the board should be more consistent with interpretations/opinions while contemplating rendering a decision. Community members appearing before the board for re-designation or boundary extensions should leave with a positive experience regardless of outcome.”
- “Some of the processes are fine, others need some modification. The growth center process, in particular is extremely complex and time consuming; I think many communities that go through the process question whether the program benefits are worth the designation exercise. There also appear to be inconsistencies within the growth center guidelines, or at least in the interpretation of the guidelines by those responsible for reviewing applications.”
- “Reducing/combining the number of designation programs. Improving/increasing the incentives that would steer development to designated areas.”

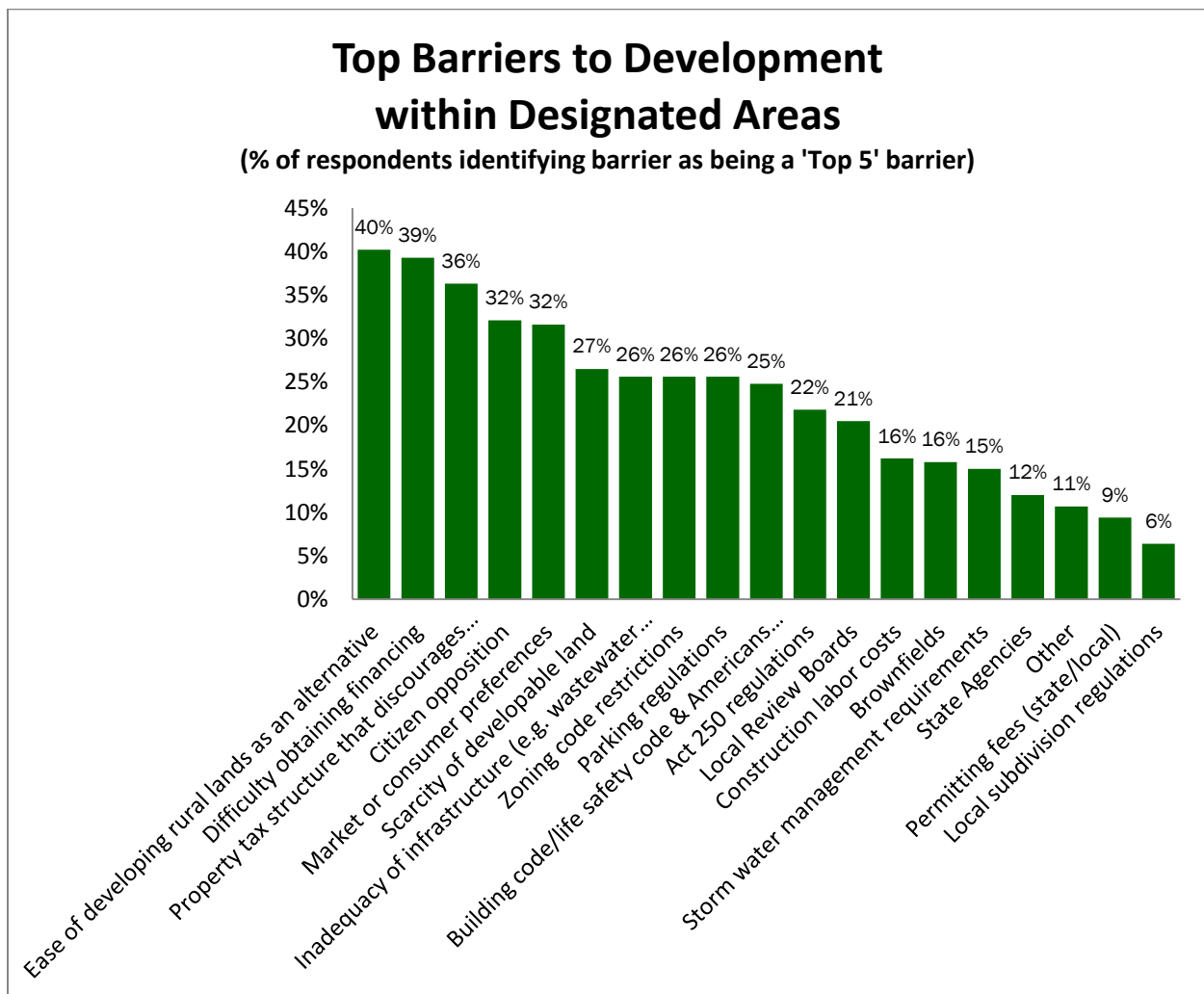
Several of the open-ended responses stated they simply did not know enough about how the programs worked to comment on their effectiveness.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Focus renewal process on demonstrated progress and commitment, rather than paperwork	62.7%
Reward communities for achieving program goals / benchmarks	59.9%
Integration of designation process with municipal plans	55.8%
Simplify the designation and renewal process	53.0%
Provide more local technical assistance	50.2%
Integrate review of zoning/implementation program into renewal process	42.9%
No changes are needed, the process generally works well	3.2%

Question 8 - Please select the top five barriers to development/redevelopment within designated areas?

The top barriers to development/redevelopment identified by respondents included, the “Ease of developing rural lands as an alternative” followed by “Difficulty obtaining financing.” Interestingly, “Difficulty obtaining financing” was cited more often by planners (50%) and downtown organization staff (58.3%) than developers (30%) and downtown business owners (52%.) Regional planners felt strongly (70.8%) that inadequate infrastructure was the biggest barrier to development in designated areas. Some of the barriers that were highlighted several times in the open ended part of the question included:

- the cost of structured parking (as opposed to parking regulations, and
- the ability of any individual (board members, town officials, interested party) to delay projects and add cost.



Question 9 - How effective would the following incentives be in supporting the designation goals?

The top two incentives selected by respondents were 1) “Property owner incentives to promote investment in existing buildings (i.e. tax credits)” and 2) “Prioritize state funding toward investments into the designated areas.” The third most popular incentive listed was an “Increase funding for municipalities to plan for growth and redevelopment.” Two themes in the open-ended responses included:

- Make sure that any incentives for new development don’t promote sprawl and prioritize investment into rehabilitating what is existing.
- Envision diverse ‘nimble’ approaches to funding/financing projects (especially infrastructure.)

Answer Options	Extremely effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not at all effective	Don't know
Property owner incentives to promote investment in existing buildings (i.e. tax credits)	120 (52%)	78 (34%)	24 (10%)	5 (2%)	3 (1%)
Prioritize state funding toward investments into the designated areas	108 (48%)	82 (36%)	19 (8%)	2 (1%)	15 (7%)
Increase funding for municipalities to plan for growth and redevelopment	90 (39%)	74 (32%)	44 (19%)	8 (4%)	12 (5%)
Land owner incentives to build new housing within walking distances to the community center	68 (30%)	81 (36%)	48 (21%)	16 (7%)	14 (6%)
Locate state buildings in designated areas	65 (29%)	72 (32%)	52 (23%)	16 (7%)	18 (8%)
Target brownfield investments/grants in designated areas	58 (26%)	82 (36%)	46 (20%)	14 (6%)	25 (11%)
Increase technical assistance and educational programs	47 (21%)	80 (36%)	71 (32%)	12 (5%)	15 (7%)

Question 10 - How effective would the following actions be in supporting the designation goals?

“Financial incentives to master plan & permit development within designated areas” and “Expert staff to support and assist in local plan design/implementation” were considered ‘extremely effective’ or ‘effective’ of listed actions. “No Act 250 review within designated areas for communities with state approved (Downtown Board) master plans” received a more polarized response than other actions listed. Three themes in the open ended responses (41) included:

- “Exempting projects from Act 250 review needs to be coupled with strengthening Act 250 to better address sprawl and development in non-designated areas”
- Increase capacity for towns to plan and come up with regulations that are “fair, simple and straightforward”
- “Coordination of town, state and federal requirements and wants.”

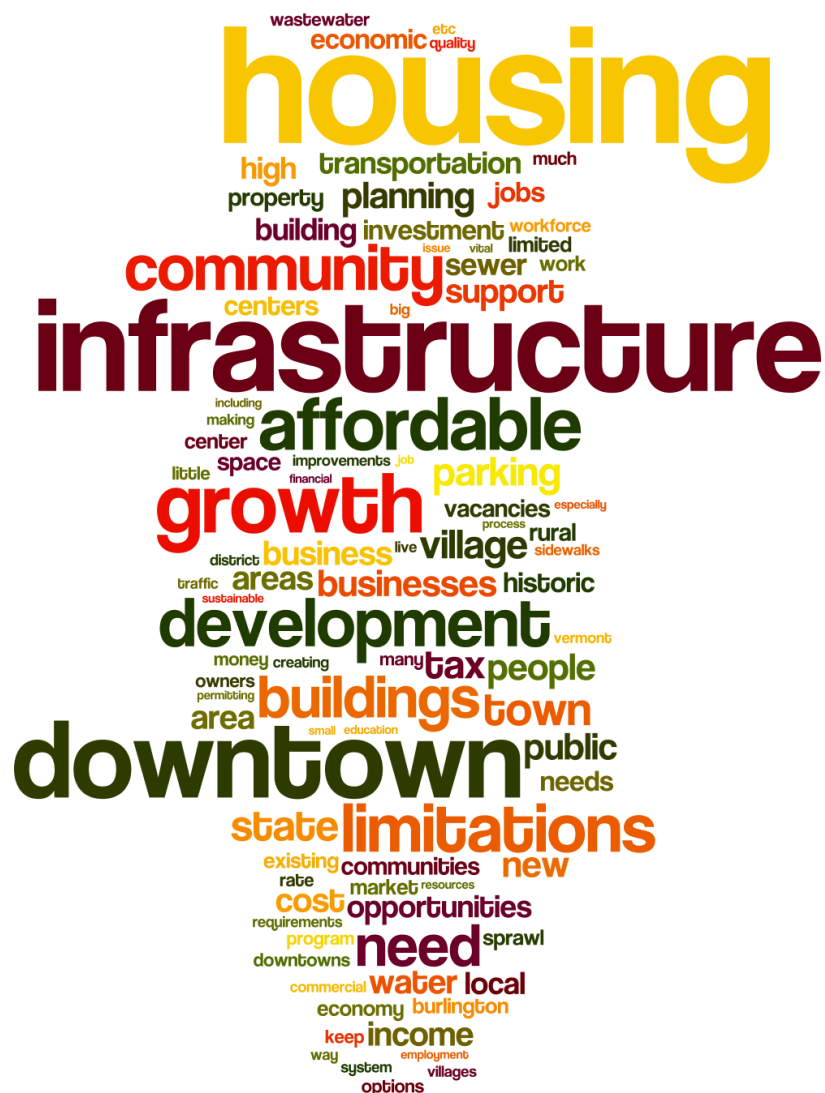
Answer Options	Extremely effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not at all effective	Don't know
Financial incentives to master plan & permit development within designated areas	74 (32%)	104 (45%)	33 (14%)	5 (2%)	16 (7%)
No Act 250 review within designated areas for communities with state approved (Downtown Board) master plans	74 (32%)	63 (27%)	35 (15%)	26 (11%)	33 (14%)
Expert staff to support and assist in local plan design/implementation	54 (23%)	100 (43%)	49 (21%)	15 (6%)	13 (6%)
Create permit ombudsmen to expedite state permit reviews	50 (22%)	77 (33%)	50 (22%)	15 (6%)	40 (17%)
Create model bylaws to promote more consistent zoning bylaws among communities	21 (9%)	80 (35%)	79 (34%)	27 (12%)	22 (10%)
Add more Environmental Court judges	8 (4%)	26 (12%)	59 (26%)	58 (26%)	72 (32%)

Question 11 - What is the most important growth or revitalization issue facing your community in the next 20 years?

This open-ended question received 202 responses with issues related to housing and infrastructure topping the list. Generally speaking, many were concerned with:

- The need for a mix of quality housing, especially housing that is affordable to young people earning Vermont wages.
- Infrastructure limitations, particularly those related to wastewater

Wordcloud of open ended responses addressing the most important growth or revitalization issue facing communities in the next 20 years?



Question 12 - What types of training would make communities more successful in achieving the programs goals?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Tax Credits and Redevelopment Tools	70.0%	159
Marketing and Promotion	52.0%	118
Capital Improvement Plans and Budgeting	47.1%	107
Downtown Urban Design Assistance	42.7%	97
Community Visioning and Consensus Building	38.3%	87
Historic Preservation	37.0%	84
Buy Local Programs	37.0%	84
Conducting Efficient & Effective Local Development Review	33.5%	76
Local Land Use Planning Fundamentals	32.6%	74
Form Based Codes	30.4%	69
Organizational Capacity Building	26.4%	60
Model Codes / Bylaws	24.7%	56
Resilency Planning / Flood Plain Management	17.2%	39

Appendix – Responses to Open Ended Questions

Note: Responses have not been edited.

Question 1 - What best describes your role? (Other)

Attorney for developers
I own many properties in Brandon including the Power House
Legislative
Public transportation provider
Purchaser of tax credits
Mayor / Developer / General downtown fan
Probono professional contribution.
Nonprofit/advocate
City Manager's Office - Downtown Development Side
Economic development
Municipal Manager
Nonprofit not advocate
Citizen
Economic Development Specialist
Zoning Administrator
Municipal Manager
Municipal Staff
Arts presenter
Construction Professional
Downtown organization & historic preservationist, also represent a downtown business
Quasi Public
Also have rental housing in downtown area
And architect
Lawyer
Commercial Real Estate Broker
Interested citizen
CEO of Electric utility
Also owner, select board member and professional consultant
Zoning Administrator
I manage a downtown business
ZA
ZA
Consultant and zoning officer
Town Manager
Regional Commissioner, Regional Transportation Commissioner, Trained Planner
Development office municipality
State & federal funder
Funder
Non-profit Economic Development
Municipal Manager

Question 5 – What goals of the designation program are most important to your community or organization? (Open ended responses.)

Encourage use of tax credits. Increase preservation of historic fabric to preserve community identity
Increase incentives for development within downtowns and centers instead of in greenfields.
1) Starting conversations in villages about goals for the future.
2) Insuring public-private discussions about visions and actions for the future.
The Village Center Designation process is also a good tool to begin a discussion about where a community's center is and what people believe is important about it. This is valuable even if the community does not pursue "official" benefits.
Prevent sprawl, promote healthy communities, promote public participation in community decisions
Create and sustain jobs
Incentives are the most important piece of the puzzle. Planning goals are important, but the incentives need to be there to implement the goals. It is cheaper and easier to develop projects in greenfield locations, these programs should provide permitting and financial incentives. The incentives should be broadly based and not as narrowly defined as the current incentives.
I see improvement of the existing affordable housing stock as more important than simply providing more. Would like to emphasize improvement of what is already there.
Last goal listed - enhance sense of place is VERY important but revitalize historic centers is NOT AT ALL important
Promote transparency with town government.
Expand the tax base and focus growth in an existing urban center
Increase services that will promote attraction of new business downtown. Review ease of parking and feasibility of reducing parking fees. Provide tax (etc) incentives for businesses that use existing inventory of buildings rather than building new.
Confirm that the Town Manager and the Selectboard is engaged with and supportive of the designated downtown ethos as a priority
Energy Conservation, Efficiency and Curtailment in historic downtown buildings (thereby reducing operating costs - lowering rents or making business operations more fiscally feasible)
Eeducing the amount of low income housing in our downtown!
Encourage patterns of village mixed use type of development..... undo euclidian restrictive zoning.
encourage local ownership.... encourage financial institutions and investment avenues that can help entrepreneur hoping to try new things. Too often the "standard practices" of financial institutions don't allow projects to come to reality.
Recognise that transportation planning is landuse planning, and ensure that (urban) design is part of the transportation planning solution.
Combine flood resiliency goals with economic revitalization and diversity goals.
Encourage the installation of automatic sprinkler systems in our down town buildings to protect the public and the historic fabric/culture of our buildings. To promote the use of our vacant upper stories by offering incentives to developers.
Resource development and education to assist in making it all happen
Need to intensely watch subsidized housing against fighting existing landlords trying to compete for rentals. Subsidized housing has significant advantages in upgrading where as local landlords don't have free money.
Branding.
Improve the efficacy of our zoning bylaws to promote these goals
Promote development patterns that lead to the efficient expenditure of public funds and private investment. Promote options that reduce people's reliance on automobiles and thus reduce carbon emissions.
Keep vt government out of local decisions
We have already achieved many of these goals and already have plenty of low-income housing.
Technology, Cell, Expanded Wireless Internet
Varied business types To bring people downtown

Creating a community contributing people want to live in and can support in a realistic manner. Why should those that contribute in every way spend so much money on those they are afraid to meet on the street. Why are we not spending our money on those that are going to build a beautiful, nurturing community now and for the future?
It is not only the supply of housing but the quality of housing.
Do away with the downtown park in front of People's Bank and put parking back we have a nice park by the falls we need parking worst then we need 2 parks
Subsidized housing levels are very high in our Downtown.
Find and secure more community needed Businesses
Provide all necessary services in the downtown so it is truly walkable and serves our elderly
Prime ag mitigation and Act 250 exemptions.
Many of the above are important goals - but were not originally the central goals of the designation program per se. Several are things towns have to do anyways - like adequate water and sewer...and zoning to protect natural resources and transit options and public involvement etc... If this is about the DOWNTOWN PROGRAM, providing funding for downtown improvements and tax credits to support /encourage private investment in designated districts ought to be on the list above - - it is A PRIORI !
Develop consistent method of assessing existing vacant/abandoned/underutilized buildings in our downtowns across the county. Develop a matrix for analysing the buildings mentioned above that can be used by anyone interested in development of buildings within a downtown. Bring the existing planning and zoning and town plan into every analysis of properties by the downtown programs. Have the resources available to accomplish realistic goals and put our work plans into place.
pursue possible central heat systems
Training for local DRBs and staff to understand good process, application of the law and regulations (rather than personal preferences) and the limits of their authority.
1. Support for Vermont's Local Food movement
2. Support for an decentralized electric power grid
3. Insistence that remote areas of the state cannot be provided the quality of service that town centers receive, and that that is a good thing.
Energy efficiency should be included in some of the above goals.
Providing incentives that make commercial development in designated areas attractive to developers is an important goal.
Ensuring that the goods and services needs of a population in a compact service area is important.
Farms -- and the working landscape -- are sometimes a part of our village centers (Craftsbury village has Pete's Greens, and Danville is abutted by pasture lands. Those uses are viewed as an important part the community's character, but I'm not sure how these uses are viewed by the downtown board. Are they viewed as essential to the community or are they viewed as fragmenting the village core?
Increase job opportunities
Increase # of professional career opportunities in the region.
Jobs available for our college graduates who want to stay in Vermont
Municipalities will only opt into the programs if they believe their are real incentives for themselves or their citizens. Right now most of the programs as structured offer very little to most communities (Downtown program works, village center has potential benefit and relatively easy application process). The others, especially the growth center program, are more work and regulation than benefit.
Provide financial programs (e.g. tax credits) to encourage property owners to improve buildings within designated areas

Question 7 - Which of the following possible changes to the designation process would improve the program? (Open ended responses.)

Not sure what you mean by integration of zoning in review.
Integrating review of implementation program into renewal process.
Reward communities for achieving community goals/benchmarks.
VT Neighborhoods needs help, it has not lived up to its promise. Overall, there are too many different designations. It would be good if some could be combined somehow.
Village Center Designation should not be tied in any way to adoption of zoning regulations. It is currently a strong non-regulatory tool for promoting smart growth and planning in communities where there is not public support for land use regulations.
The VT Neighborhoods designation timeline does not work with the reality of obtaining local & state permits. It is almost impossible to reap the benefit of the reduced fees for A250 & water/wastewater under the current program design.
Simply put this program is mired in bureaucratic waste. The program and its staff seem more concerned with forms and checklists than what actually happens on the ground. This is a shame, because the group is full of wonderful people with so many great ideas that are useful and relevant. The program should not be shut down, but rather retooled to focus on results on the ground and not paper for the sake of paper. Transparency and accountability are necessary and worthy goals, but they should not hijack real results. There is a balance to be struck – right now the program is off-kilter.
The relationship between the downtown designation and our drinking water loan program is the increased priority a water system improvement project receives if it serves a population center with a downtown designation.
Would like to see it be a requirement to have consistent preservation ordinances within Vermont's designated downtown.
Allow new town centers to benefit from more programs.
I believe there is too much emphasis on zoning and its regulatory impact. Zoning laws need to be adjusted to reflect more flexible approach to promoting development.
Allow local communities to create their own indicators and ensure that these are simple to measure, report and understand.
Honest, not holding back on programs that would help the developer. For example, asking for tax abatement early on in the process and being told that there is no formal process for tax stabilization only to find out three years later that a program does exist.
More funding (i.e. less competition for funding resources among projects that rank well)
provide for accountability of the municipality to the private sector
Provide the capability for paid staff time to operate the program
Ensure product, not planning, is the most important component of the process - follow up is critical after designation.
Expand focus of program to address more than just downtown/village core.
One area I think can be improved upon is bringing predictability to the process. I feel the board should be more consistent with interpretations/opinions while contemplating rendering a decision. Community members appearing before the board for re-designation or boundary extensions should leave with a positive experience regardless of outcome.
We have had little interaction beyond securing designation. We are currently studying ways to revitalize town center under a planning grant.
Some of these may be mutually exclusive - #s 1 and 2!
Downtown and Village centers are enormously effective, Downtown tax credits are a great tool. Not sure that growth center designations really address and encourage smart growth and compact settlement
Not Sure
Don't know.....
Need to address downtown centers with tax incentives for new businesses and offer grants tied to investments by new adventures. Need to address toilet facilities in all businesses and public facilities.

TA with respect to affordable housing and economic development in small towns.
Don't know with respect to all of these
make the community see the vision. They need to be more involved as do the existing business owners.
Celebrate achievements in meeting community and economic development challenges. Elevate and integrate the program, participating municipalities and NGOs focusing on this work in the state's economic development and marketing efforts. Acknowledge the heart & soul of this state often. More strongly advocate for enabling legislation that enhances and expands these programs that benefit the state's economy and community.
Please don't make the transportation fund application process any more technical. My Selectboard does not like to spend money on soft costs. The more formalized plans required by the Board, the less the program will untilamtelty help my town.
Bring back Joss Besse.
too much low income housing in Springfield already, send it to another town, our taxes are high enough providing schools to these people who don't pay their fair share of property taxes.
Designation process should not be a separate process from the municipal plan
Integrate Four Point Approach into the designation and review process and for goal setting, perhaps including a strategic review against these goals.
Remove Act 250 process requirements in those municipalities having designated growth areas as long as they have robust planning and zoning as certified by their RPC.
Recognize the importance of existing and permitted biz/industrial parks as designated growth area.
Some of the processes are fine, others need some modification. The growth center process, in particular is extremely complex and time-consuming; I think may communities that go through the process question whether the program benefits are worth the designation exercise. There also appear to be inconsistencies within the growth center guidelines, or at least in the interpretation of the guidelines by those responsible for reviewing applications.
It is important not to step on the role and authority of other boards such as planning or DRB
The North Bennington Center is already built out. There have been very few changes over the last few years. I'm also chair of the development review board and I mention the village center program in the very few instances when I think a project might be eligible. But I've never gotten feedback on who has applied. I also haven't gotten feedback on changes in the program. Your questionnaire seems to imply that it has been expanded in scope since we applied for and received designation. How?
Don't know process well enough to comment on.
I am really not that familiar with how the programs are working
Decrease the layers of designation....for example the need to have a new town center designation then a growth center designation. Why not have one designation or at least one process?
Reward success, but don't be quick to punish failure.
bigger carrots and sticks
Integration of designation process with regional plans.
Provide clear benchmarks for standards to be included in regional and municipal plans and bylaws.
I don't know en ought to answer this intelligently.
Downtown Program is effective and supportive. A few legislative changes to empower and encourage municipalities to keep all buildings in business district rehabilitated and occupied would make all the growth center, historic preservation, and downtown programs much more effective.
Growth Center designation requirement that the area is contiguous with downtown limits use in redeveloping moribund strip development areas as mixed use neighborhoods (or exposes intact quality neighborhoods to unwanted commercial development).
Reducing/combining the number of designation programs
Improving/increasing the incentives that would steer development to designated areas
It would be helpful if the mapping process required some level of RPC involvement. We offer our technical assistance whenever we get the chance, but that offer isn't always accepted, perhaps because the

municipalities don't realize how we could improve the maps and supporting application. While I'm hesitant to create another layer of review to this process, I think that the process isn't always well coordinated with the RPCs. We don't always get informed of changes to the maps.
Make benefits more meaningful thereby making the renewal process worth doing
simplify particularly the renewal process
don't need to include water and sewer compliance in the downtown designation, though infrastructure is critical in the growth-oriented designations (growth center, new town center, neighborhoods)
The programs do not need to be tweaked, they need to be completely rewritten. Currently I see very little reason to participate in the programs as they are structured. I would much rather focus on work that offers real incentives or solutions. The programs offer little incentives to most municipalities and require a significant amount of work. The Downtown Board review process is a big part of the problem. The Board consists of a number of statewide interest groups all trying to advance their own agenda. Many view this process as an opportunity to regulate development, but have no grasp of local politics or the thought process behind the applications. It is one of the WORST governmental processes I have ever witnessed.
For a program that provides no organizational financial support, the level of expectations/requirements is much too stringent.

Question 8 - Please select the top five barriers to development / redevelopment within designated areas? (Open ended responses.)

I think the only real barrier is an attitude of fear or a perception of loss of control by property owners about working with anything having to do with the government-- i believe when we overcome that, the process is quite effective.
Cost of attractive, energy efficient and well-designed construction generally. Outpaces cost of 'lesser' products. Rehab, historic preservation, brownfields, demolition....all add considerably to the cost. Appeals, also cost considerably, whether they are frivolous or not.
Need better awareness on the part of general public and Select Boards and committees.
1) Ability to access adequate planning funds is a severe limitation to development/redevelopment in village centers.
2) Wastewater rules focus on big systems, which are not always feasibility or the best option for small communities.
3) Wastewater program is missing monies for bridging the gap between feasibility studies and engineering level planning.
Where there is good local review capacity it would be good to further eliminate redundant local and Act 250 review for affordable housing. Further restrict subjectivity of conditional use criteria. Eliminate the any 10 appellants provision in Chapter 117.
The inability to access planning funds to address the other issues listed above is a major barrier, especially for Village Centers
Not sure any of the above apply.
FINANCIAL SUPPORT/ASSISTANCE
I would check construction costs, including material costs.
Various jurisdictions that refuse to work together or make adjustments. Needs coordination between town, state and federal regulations and reviews.
Property owners unrealistic as to the value of their property
I am considering zoning code restrictions to include parking requirements as well as set backs and other downtown issues.

inadequate local funding for projects
Cost of development in designated areas, particularly historic downtowns and village centers, is much higher than the cost of development on greenfield sites. Building code requirements are greater, sites are tighter and require increased construction oversight, structured parking costs are greater,
zoning is unfriendly , slow and has turned away a lot of possible business in our community
Lack of infrastructure (and financing for..) as #1
Need to get beyond the focus of low/mod in downtowns, we need higher end clientel that will utilize the downtown businesses.
There is substantial uncertainty in the Act 250 review process that can draw out review for several years at the state level.
Zoning regulations need to be reflective of 2012 - not 1920 when they were developed. Nothing has changed, it is jus adding layers of bureaucratic hassle to the process and stifles innovation.
Volunteer boards and committees with too little time to promote these ideas and go through application process
Lack of awareness of general population regarding the importance of planning and the options
I have only selected two becasue these two (especially ACT 250 and how it caters to minor project opponents) are the two barriers we have come across; other issues are not barriers. Actually VT has (generally speaking) a good and fair permit process OTHER than Act 250.
Municipal governmental failure to embrace program in the past; we now have new town manager and a selectboard that is committed to the program and we are hopeful for a collaborative, successful program.
Poperty Taxes, Surrounding Environments adjacent to new properties. Aging infrastructure.
Cost of structured parking and building on constrained sites.
Not citizen oposition but (unstated) opposition by the Town Manager and the Selectboard Chair
Availability of convenient parking. Planners like to think it is not important. It is very important!
Equity, Capital, Local government support
less expensive to develop rural land - expense of downtown infrastructure, fees, taxes
Transportation infrastructure requirements
Act 250 and state agencies are very important entities to development and should be expanded if anything. The permitting process is there for a reason and unregulated growth is not safe for our future.
The added costs of building within a municipal core often make the cornfield more appealing..... certainly programs of tax act, tax stabilization, etc help. Any further assistance here could help.
As a very small town we have not encountered many of the above barriers
It's complex and different in each community. Our community is working on streamlining and integrating the entire process, working closely with the RDC, improving zoning and local permitting process, revolving loan fund, who to talk to for state issues, and how to best provide guidance and help. Without a staff person at the muni level to coordinate and facilitate, its challenging. Tech assistance is a big need.
In a lot of ways, it isn't the actual brownfields or flood related issues that are barriers, it is the lack of understanding. People hear "brownfield" and shot down, thinking they will have to do ridiculously expensive remediation to the entire neighborhood. this general lack of knowlege also applies to building codes, ADA, and permitting in general.
Property owners who are more focused on property rights and profit than public good.
Citizens willing to volunteer.
Town municipal involvement and role.
Very different issues for a small town with no infrastructure and a larger city or town
X Lack of interconnected rail and bus public transportation system to relieve dependance on autos
X Poor leadership by state and local elected officials and bureaucrats
X Reactive local and state "planning" review system that restricts development options and relies on profit motives to generate projects, rather than government-led planning initiatives based on achieving constructive solutions to public needs
Lack of strong parking regulations encourages development outside downtowns where massive lots can be

built.
review boards, developers, designers, consultants not understanding processes or who to go to for information and clarity of moving a project or idea forward
Local population in small rural towns
Citizen apathy while complaining about city at the same time.
I would say that departments in state agencies can be a barrier when there is lack of clear communications with the downtowns/village centers, et al, that would facilitate alignment with the state (to avoid being at cross-purposes) and leveraging assets and opportunities. Sometimes it feels it is more difficult and time consuming to turn over rocks for opportunities that the state agencies are fully aware of and for whatever reason are not sharing or making it easier to access the resources or technical assistance that we can leverage from. Inter-Agency cooperation is key to effective planning and implementation because everyone puts their strengths on the table to find solutions. More creative solutions. Faster. More economical. More success.
Small biz loan committee is gender bias and does not have enough representation of women on that committee. Plus women who apply are inappropriately subjected to questioning about their finances and household structure that men would never be asked. Check how many women owned businesses who have applied for the town loan fund have been approved compared to men. It's embarrassing and will potentially end up in litigation. This survey also has elements of push-polling. I've never seen a town so in need of handicapped accessibility upgrades, yet somehow everything seems to get grandfathered in, and never changes. I only see questions here that imply accessibility is somehow an impediment, rather than a need.
There is no regional regulatory or community development coordination.
Local groups working at cross purposes for Downtown Revitalization. Adequate promotion/marketing of Downtown property for purchase or lease
Construction cost
We need more tax incentives for businesses to stimulate the owners into doing building improvements and revitalization efforts to their businesses.
Don't know process well enough to comment on.
Although I think difficulty with regulations is exaggerated, at least for the seasoned developer, all of the above are factors.
The economic downturn has hindered development and has slowed our growth center. The worst single factor is the lending industry. The majority of new units in the growth center are "affordable" and well suited to first time home buyers. Most mortgages now require 20% down and this has decreased the number of available purchasers. The developers have turned to making the units rental. Banks will not finance loans for purchasing units with high numbers of rentals and the few units left for sale have sat. Commercial continues to lag in vacancy and now residential has slowed too. Act 250 has jurisdiction over some of the growth center and has stated that no additional dev. can occur until traffic is resolved (even with a fix on the horizon) and is quite impossible (no flexibility).
Parking inventory and the cost of structured parking.
Property valuation, tax structure, and state policy that values agricultural land high and encourages rural land development rather than development in concentrated village centers.
How about FUNDING for downtown planning, infill, redevelopment and parking /transit infrastructure!
We are regional centers yet cannot access property tax support from the regions - We need a local option tax add-on that voters can enact - 1% for improvements / investments that we locally determine are needed in our designated downtowns!
In many small downtowns the ground floor commercial spaces do not command enough rent to cover the cost of renovation and operation of historic, inefficient properties with limited parking. What type of businesses can small downtowns attract to use these spaces?
Property owner cooperation
Program benefits are disproportionately skewed to subsidized housing versus other critical and desired economic development pieces.
provide for no increase in property tax on the new development for the first few years when capital is tight. Philly has a great example.
Eliminate the dual Act 250 local zoning dichotomy.
Pre permit certain things, like which historic buildings can go or must stay.

Not necessarily parking regulations but parking availability and management of public parking.
Image/reputation: downtowns with vacancies are labeled as blighted and spiral down.
third barrier is the current landowners. Great programs will not make property owners any better.
Tax incentives and financing need to be instituted or improved for landlords who renovate, rehabilitate, and occupy properties. Penalties need to be levied on landlords who let properties in the district sit empty, deteriorate, or just use them as write off.
Market is not operating such that ROI is met (cost of construction exceeds income earned)
1. The Act 250 review and permitting process takes unreasonably long and is unpredictable. While both embody protections that are necessary, they are sometimes too open ended, which allows inappropriate challenges.
Citizen opposition that I have encountered pertains mostly to the issue of density, particularly in village centers. (e.g. Peacham). I think that this is because "compact and dense" are somewhat relative descriptors and can vary greatly from one community to another.
State agencies and local oversight are not constantly evaluating the latest trends and information on safety, fire code, natural resource usage (e.g. pressurized tanking systems) that are used in other states that enable easier redevelopment and reuse of historic buildings.
eliminating act 250 from downtown development would be a very big incentive
Many of the communities that have designated villages are so small that the market simply does not drive redevelopment. It is often much easier and cheaper to develop in more rural areas. More communities need to be strict about the location of commercial development (particularly retail) in relation to villages and downtowns. Primary retail and services such as banks MUST be limited to these centers.
Current application procedures and fee structures create a disincentive to downtown redevelopment due to cost, time and number of required review procedures
NH is perceived as being easier to work with/in than VT
The reality of being having towns that border NH where there is no sales tax. The idea of retail in these border towns is not realistic.

Question 9 - How effective would the following incentives be in supporting the designation goals? (Open ended responses.)

Avoid sharp lines between designation areas for incentives. One block or two away from a designation still contributes to the designation areas, which are intentionally quite compact for other reasons.
There is a need to examine whether state programs actually work to support designated areas before prioritizing their investments there (see Section 8 wastewater comments as one example).
Prioritizing state funding toward investments in designated areas is potentially a double-edged sword, I do not favor that.. Environmental court needs further reform to shorten appeals process.
Funding for planning and construction of small scale wastewater treatment. Current state policies and funding favor large systems (even if they are in ground decentralized systems) that are not practical in most Village settings.
Evaluate other state policies/permitting processes for compatibility with designation and state planning goals.
TAX CREDITS ARE HELPFUL ONLY IF THE PROPERTY OWNER HAS THE FULL FINANCIAL MEANS TO PUT UP FRONT FOR THE PROJECT. IT IS TOO BAD THERE ARE NOT MANY GRANT PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO THE PROFIT BUSINESS SECTOR TO ASSIST IN UPGRADING HISTORICAL BUILDING. ONLY IF THEY ARE GOING TO BE USED FOR HOUSING. WHAT ABOUT THE BUILDINGS THAT PROVIDE SPACES FOR RETAIL/OFFICES, THAT KEEP THE SMALL BUSINESS ECONOMY AFLOAT IN THEIR COMMUNITIES???? HOW CAN WE IMPROVE ASSISTANCE????
Grants for additional senior housing and assisted living building in this community.
increase incentives for private redevelopment in designated areas.

Newport City zoning doesn't allow any new multi family dwellings to be approved, so building incentives for new housing within walking distance wouldn't work.
I am concerned that the last incentive is too vague and might have unintended consequences to rural areas where investment in communications/internet, environmental improvements (erosion control etc) and other investments can be important to farmers and others.
Remove all Act 250 requirements for projects within designation areas.
Ensure individual cities and small businesses have the resources needed develop economic vibrancy in all growth areas, not just historic centers.
Last one with the understanding that it can not be provided with inisting underutilized existing building/s in area.
Tax Increment Financing should allow for a 20 year payback on major infrastructure improvements.
(not use if the current TIF legislation allows for this)
First priority for state investment should be designated downtowns.
Incentives for developers/owners should be highest in designated downtowns.
Municipal financial incentives to target local funding and effort
The penultimate question speaks to Key Settlement Policies. The last question should be more focused on increassing funding to provide product.
Provide funding for infrastructure construction or upgrades. Relieve permitting constraints in community centers. Provide support to homegrown businesses and home occupations/telecommuting.
Local zoning should be in line with the vision of the downtown program.
Some of these things are already in place. More is needed in tech assistance, muni planning, tax credits.
Increase tax credits, VHCB, CDBG and water and sewer funding
Again, there is a lack of knowlege among property owners and builders as to what can be done. Builders build the same stuff they have always built, in part because they are unaware that there is an option. Homeowners get their design advice from the guy at Home Depot who is there to sell products, not to consider the overall quality of the environment.
State needs to pay some fair share of property use. Educational assistance needs incentives build in the reason to go.
Target money for infrastructure improvements (e.g. wastewater) in small towns (pop <6000) within designated Village centers
State buildings should provide payments in lieu of property taxes to local communities
As always in doing business, being able to share the costs and leverage resources is key to successful economic and community development.
Grant money to improve facades and exterior signage. Towns that look beautiful and enticing generate traffic.
More collaboration with non-profits offering technical assistance to micro-businesses, since that is what our downtown dynamic revolves around and what attracts people to town.
State building offices should be built in struggling downtowns to serve as employment and commerce anchors (through the workers). State offices should not be rebuilt in areas like Waterbury where good highway infrastructure exists and the land is otherwise developable by the public sector. Vermont may be the only state in New England that does not require that state offices be targeted to areas that are in need of redevelopment (as measure by unemployment, wages and other tangible economic factors).
Establish benchmarks for Downtowns, something communities can strive for. EX: Establish % for market rate vs. subsidized housing in Downtown.
Don't know process well enough to comment on.
State funding and buildings are supposed to be aimed at growth centers now however this has not occurred. The State has not even considered the growth center for the two new projects they have located in town. Land owner or permitting incentives may be the key.
"State" uses must be subject to full property taxes. State uses must not provide private cafeterias.
See comment under # 8 above
Eliminate state laws that promote destruction of downtown areas, such as that which gives priority to VTrans projects that run through downtowns, regardless of the (negative) impact those projects will have.

Provide more nimble case-by-case state funding/financing for entrepreneurial public/private development relationships that are developed at the local level and don't necessarily fit nicely into the current funding mechanisms, such as VCDP. Offer more funding and support for projects that do not include subsidized housing.
the last bullet should include "and revise bylaws"
Rather than pay incentives to develop appropriately, I suggest that we clamp down on inappropriate development (e.g., sprawl and greenfield development outside growth centers).
state buildings - in many cases we do want them (like offices), but not always need to be careful in locating social services - many downtowns experiencing problems with crime and behavior. IF we want these services in downtown, THEN there is an equal state obligation to participate in the mitigation of the problems
Incentives will only be "somewhat effective" if property owners are actually aware that the incentives exist!
Prioritizing all State government expenditures towards larger downtowns leaves a lot of the State out in the cold.
We need higher ed. Tech assistance can be meaningful, but is costly and underutilized by consumers.
Increased funding and technical assistance for infrastructure in designated areas.

Question 10 - How effective would the following actions be in supporting the designation goals? (Open ended responses.)

I made the comment about zoning because i believe zoning should be unique to each community to reflect its heritage and priorities. One size does not fit all and suburban zoning models used in the 1960s-1980s did not support compact historic downtown development.
Low cost capital pool for smart growth development. Incentives for downtown businesses.,
Funding to support planning in small, rural communities is essential to pursuing the designation goals. Most of the choices in this section are not pertinent to village center designation, and most of Vermont is small and rural.
Support for planning of infrastructure development in rural Village Centers. There is a major gap between "feasibility study" level information and the information needed to begin engineering and permitting a system.
Change legislative laws than encourage/or mandate municipalities to adopt "on the record review" to reduce duplicity, costs and mutiple appeals in the Environmental Court.
Coordination of town, state and federal requirements and wants.
Don't know if the long delays to get the court to hear cases is the result of too few judges or just plain slow decision making on the ones we have
No Act 250 review within designated areas would be a huge incentive to investment but would weaken protection of historic resources there.
It comes down to reduced costs and access to money
Technical assistance for outreach programs with small businesses to build economic vibrancy. Financing for development projects, small businesses.
Given that ACT 250 was designed to restrict development OUTSIDE of downtown or town area, it should not apply within designated towns. I STRONGLY support this action.
training by experts that are not state agency staff
Interaction and Support from other communities, network of businesses. Tax incentive for business to expand. Green Mountian Roaster opening franchise stores outside of Middlebury. Promote tourism. Tax competition with New Hampshire for goods sold.
How would permit ombudsmen expedite reviews? Shouldn't all applicants get same level of service? What slows the reviews? Fix that.
Zoning such as Form Base where a potential quality developer would know ahead of time if a potential project is likely to get approval would help.Although it is yet to be seen if Form Base can counteract those who simply want no change not matter how good the project.
The secret is to reduce appeals through a strong and clear regulatory program that encourages

development, rather than a Code that is restrictive. That way less judges will be needed, not more as implied by question 4.
Provide funding for staffing options at local level such as circuit riding/consultant planners to local governments engaged in planning
Comments relate to thoughts for other larger towns
No Act 250 review would be a bad idea. Everyone should have to go through the same rules - a fairness issue. Better to make changes to Act 250, but that could be very risky.
I tend to think Act 250 is rarely the problem . We are in year 7 trying to permit 36 homes in West Woodstock across from the High School. The courts not act 250 are extra slow.
Need to support communities that are centers that bring other nearby communities in for services. Police, Fire, Libraries, Recreational facilities, schools, traffic control, roads and other significant services are financial and management burdens on the smaller cities and towns.
Target money for infrastructure improvements (e.g. wastewater) in small towns (pop <6000) within designated Village centers
Making homogenous regulations throughout VT through use of TA staff or model bylaws is a bad idea- better to encourage creative zoning solutions that are uniquely designed for the needs of a Town or area, through increasing grant funding to retain outside consultants who bring expertise from projects across the nation.
Expert staff could vary widely depending on the model used. Would the state provide these people? Would the RPCs be expected to play a more active role? Some RPCs are great at helping their towns, others fail to adequately assess their needs.
best to understand how to help than to confuse and live in a cloud not knowing what to do or where to go for clear information and path identification
Rural densities need to be lowered to reduce incentive to develop outside of centers.
Exempting projects from Act 250 review needs to be coupled with strengthening Act 250 to better address sprawl and development in non-designated areas
Don't know process well enough to comment on.
We need more E Court staff but not for this. The Act 250 exemption is for 200 units in our community. The Coordinator is looking at this as cumulative and trying to find a way to take jurisdiction. The developer in turn is reducing units. Shouldn't we be maximizing growth in the growth center? Remove the unit cap on the Act 250 exemption.
Dispute resolution ,appeals processes, enough judges etc are separate issues and ought to be dealt with anyway, independently of the VT DOWNTOWN PROGRAM or designations .
Form Based Code.
For second item above - Act 250 wouldn't have jurisdiction here in DD; lots are not large enough.
The State needs to take ownership of its own land use priorities and designation processes and eliminate Act 250 review in designated downtowns and growth centers. If these areas pass those designation tests, then Act 250 is nothing more than a redundant obstacle. Also, many areas of State project review, especially VTrans, are understaffed to the detriment of key local projects.
1st and 4th actions should include bylaws.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We should be clear that the municipal plan and bylaws include enough to gain designation and not require a separate plan or planning process. - If there are clear standards for plans and bylaws, RPC's could review and make this the norm, not the exception, to accomplish the state's planning goals. - In exchange for not having Act 250 review, the state should obtain a payment in lieu to be used for rural preservation.
I think in general we tend to go straight to financial incentives and I'm not at all convinced that that's the way to go. If we can make the process fairly simply and straightforward, that's more important.
It is important to consider how the Act 250 process can be improved, but this shouldn't just mean diluting or minimizing its effect. A real, informed discussion of Act 250 and it's shortcomings would be very helpful (before any legislation is changed).
Reliance on incentives does not stop inappropriate development.

the state has many more staff dedicated to programs like urban forestry or enhancements than to the designation programs. we really need to commit - through staffing and other means - to downtowns and other designations
Don't understand what the second item means.
Financial incentives, including sales/use tax free designated downtowns would be excellent.
A permit ombudsmen (Statewide position, regional or for each town?)
The first two questions assume people do not make investment decisions because they do not understand the program or regulations. They completely mischaracterize the problem. People understand the programs, it is the economics of the investment that do not work.
The downtown board is the problem. It is one of the least functional boards I have ever experienced. It consists mainly of stakeholders with entrenched positions using it as a soapbox to pontificate upon their concerns; the applicants and their communities constitute an inconvenient afterthought.
There already is a regional permit ombudsman within the district ANR office who is very helpful.

Question 11 - What is the most important growth or revitalization issue facing your community in the next 20 years? (Open ended responses.)

The graying of Vermont's population.
infrastructure limitations
Adaptive re-use; housing close to downtown/villages instead of in rural areas; marginal small local businesses which may fail without access to larger pool of customers or without other kinds of assistance.
infrastructure limitations
Sewer infrastructure, Permitting for growth within areas that are slated for growth - Town, and State rules do not work to achieve a common goal.
The availability of different forms of housing for a wide range of needs is a most pressing issue in Chittenden County, especially in and around the Burlington area.
good jobs and affordable housing for middle income people
Support and knowledge of process and importance of good design on the part of town manager and Selectboard
Infrastructure (broadband, water, sewer, sidewalks, energy) limitations in villages. Lack of housing type mix in downtowns.
Sprawl. Every town seems to have a boundary line beyond which the 7-11 ilk can run on for miles of wasteful asphalt. Take up the habitat requirements and abilities of children and the elderly, basic ecology, as an viewpoint filter for planning well integrated communities. The Plans, in general, just do not do that.
Lack of affordable housing opportunities, including workforce housing, but especially low income and supportive housing.
Infrastructure in the broadest sense. The need varies between communities, and includes water/wastewater, parking, sidewalks, stormwater etc.
vacancies
The ability to attract various size Industries to sustain such centers.
Economy
Infrastructure limitations and zoning restrictions
not enough affordable housing
infrastructure limitations
no holistic look at overall good. any little thing can throw you off. toad, arrowhead....
Infrastructure limitations and antiquated local views
inadequate zoning ordinances that discourage infill development.
LACK ON ASSISTANCE TO IMPROVE SPACES/USES FOR BUILDINGS IN THE DOWNTOWN.

appropriate business development That is the development that fits the land and need. Also, the ancillary projects that support this development, ie. roads, sidewalks, bike paths, sewers and water systems.
Need for water/sewer infrastructure.
Additional "workforce" housing in the downtown; parking availability and requirements
Lack of a viable market for affordable housing developments. There remains a tremendous need for affordable housing, yet from an economic supply and demand analysis there is very little demand.
vacant buildings downtown. High cost of private redevelopment.
jobs
Small village ctrs with relatively little "additional" developable land. We must redevelop existing spaces. We also have village ctrs located in flood fringe/zones....
Infrastructure limitations, especially traffic and sewer. Also wetland impacts where designated growth is desired.
Attracting businesses into our downtown and adding more greenspace
Building and maintaining a robust economy necessary to support a vibrant downtown
Financial viability of private development projects
Lack of economic development opportunities and commercial investment in downtowns and villages. The economy -in general.
Brownfields
Political support for compact settlement patterns
My work is focused in Burlington. Our City is the largest economic engine in the State. We have had essentially no residential vacancy in rental housing for 40 years and the commercial property market is tight as well demonstrating substantial demand for new development. There is very little available land for development and the land that is available requires massive public infrastructure and structured parking investments. Burlington is the best location for growth in the state of Vermont. It has significant water supply and wastewater treatment capacity, a stable base of employment opportunities, density to support public transportation, capacity in public schools, etc. The State benefits greatly from new investment in Burlington creating new education property tax revenue, rooms & meals tax revenue, income tax revenue, etc. at a far greater rate than in other parts of Vermont. Burlington is too often disregarded at the State level when the State should be focused on Burlington more than any other community because the return on investment of State resources directed into Burlington is far greater than any other community in Vermont.
lack of skilled workforce
lack of jobs
mortgage availability
slumlords turning our neighborhoods into section 8 housing and vacancy rates
Lack of affordable housing, need for additional public transportation routes
Traffic: congestion mitigation
Parking. Buy in from property owners who suck.
preventing sprawl into area farmland which serve as gateway to community.
Business vacancies. There is plenty of affordable housing.
Eliminate drug dealing in buildings where landlords do not screen prospective tenants. This is a huge deterrent to moving downtown.
reduce reliance on automobiles
Zoning restrictions
Low return on investment for building owners. High cost of renovations
Cost to redevelop with limited opportunity to cover the debt service. There is limited return on investment.
cooperation of town manager, select board and communication to and from residents are key,
Developing a sense of place and identity.
Rerouting of route 7 through town. empty living space above store fronts
ineffective town government,
Moving from current zoning to form based code and balancing regulations to incentivize smart growth

development.
Addressing wastewater disposal to allow concentrated growth in our villages
Getting AOT to respect our village planning goals
Vacant buildings in disrepair
Keep downtown vital, occupied and welcoming to both locals and visitors. provide space tht meets current client needs for continued employment oppertunities of various levels.
Finding the right jobs for the community that pay well and attract new graduates to the community..
infrastructure
Economic opportunity, job growth, pride of ownership of downtown property, visual perception Eg. Paint and Power Washing Downtown Buildings. Reinforce Vermont Branding. Better Signage / Graphics.
the opening of the vilas bridge, growth and developement of the island and transportation center
Economic feasibility due to high project costs generated by entitlement process fees and conditions.
Market rate housing and downtown infrastructure
brownsfields of older building sites, bringing buildings ups to existing building codes.
limited public and private parking facilities
Lack of growth, loss of educated young people for jobs elsewhere. Continued big box and strip development
Deteriorating historic buildings in the downtown need improvements including modernizing energy and energy efficiency, low income, lack of local jobs, and economic development,
Wastewater treatment limitations
Lack of community involvement.
infrastructure limitations
How to effectively manage significant growth so that it is focused in walkable areas with existing infrastructure and not in rural areas.
Getting funds to purchase/refurbish run-down buildings in downtown.
Limiting low income housing in our business district. Require local real estate owners to bring their buildings up to acceptable standards of appearance.
Low income housing we need to move it out of the downtown area
Managing the growth rate. Community consensus is we have had too much growth for the past 20 years.
Infrastructure limitations
The viability of a healthy commercial mix combined with a variety of housing types including market rate to keep a vital core community where people want to be. Vermont's unique locally owned mix of non homogenized style of life is a wonderful characteristic of who we are. to be able to experience a downtown or village and know that it is Montpelier, or Newport , or Vergenes is great. In far too much of America if you have seen one Olive Garden or one Numero Uno you have seen them all.
A horse designed by committee is a camel - we need clear vision that is not warped by the 'Political Correctness Equals Mediocrity process. Peoples aversion to new ideas need to be soltened through education.
Infrastructure (water and sewer) limitations including lack of transportation options. Limited economic development options.
Protecting the downtown culture from urban sprawl (big box stores) when much emphasis is placed on economic opportunity and growth.
infrastructure limitations. That includes ability of citizens to participate effectively. Need tech assistance to stay out in front.
Oppressive tax system that discourages investment, business relocation and start-p buisness
Vacancies. Streetscape improvements. Bury utilities.
Maintaining infrastructre
Combating sprawl
building community consensus that is inclusive and does not see low income citizens as something they need less of.
Windsor's situation may be a bit unique in that we have the infrastructure to do most anything. We have recently studied a number of housing opportunities and are currently working to implement a few. I think our

issue is going to be demonstrating what the advantages of significantly focussing growth in the downtown area can be.
landlord monopolies and intentional vacancies
Employment training, capital needed to attract new industries and a executive director to do so; we have lost manufacturing jobs and we need to replace them.
The lose of historic buildings and the historic feel of our town (Middlebury). I think that is one big reason we get tourists that come and spend money. We need to protect that! Also, we have very high taxes. Not many people can afford to live here and help to grow the town.
lack of access to transportation networks (i.e. interstate highway system)
Citizen opposition to any and all development and a permitting process that is too accommodating of that perspective
Revalidation of downtown and bringing independent business owners to Main St. Creating an atmosphere with clean parking lots, less conragating of groups in public areas, adding greenery to the public walking areas. Giving landlords with multiple floor incentives to add elevators for grow in their upper floors.
Creating a diverse downtown economy that primarily serves the needs and desires of the local population. Identifying best uses of limited downtown space. Main Street reconstruction.
Traffic and parking.
Balancing need for good jobs and environmental protection.
Vital downtown, lacking local business/services required for a vital community.
Infrastructure limitations. and our asset that is also our challenge Historic buildings.
Lack of leadership and specific goals and objectives for town manager and select board
Transportation alternatives (lack of)
Open space being developed into rural housing- 5-10 acre lots
and providing affordable housing
Wastewater infrastructure limitations
Wastewater treatment system stinks up prime waterfront real estate
Poor condition of sidewalks
Poor maintenance of parks
Too many oppressive and obtuse local planning review ordinances
Arrogant attitudes of code enforcement officials
Lack of police effectiveness in discouraging neighborhood thefts
I feel that our community is going a great job of planning for a lot of improvements that will happen over the next several years. If is this forward thinking that will propel our community for generations to come.
Lack of affordable housing
lack of business owners on main street
Lack of affordable housing
convenient, affordable options to biking, walking, bus and carpools to reduce traffic and parking congestion and create sustainable centers and communities
Empty store fronts in buildings that need updating
Vacancies
Not sure at this time.
No public transporation along the I-91 corridor.
We are limited only by our imaginations to create meaningful, rewarding, and sustainable businesses.
Downtown retail
finacial means and keeping the burden on the residents in order to maintain a level of service. but that's the problem. everyone wants low tax rates and to maintain. leaves little room for improvement and growth. change is important but the burden every year keeps going to residents. see little funds being recycled

through from the state or federal level down to towns, villages and hamlets where people live and try to keep those communities together, sustainable and vibrant, and most important, proud where they live, giving them and visitors a sense of place
Lack of housing, low income employment opportunities, lack of high quality affordable child care
Don't know
Attracting small businesses in the community
Regulations, financing, vision, infrastructure
Lack of affordable housing
Financial and people resources
Attracting businesses that can survive with a lower socioeconomic area. Creating a mixed community that allows people who cannot afford cars to walk to work, grocery stores, and necessary services while also encouraging higher income families to invest, live in, and participate in compassionate town planning. We must be inclusive in our planning, not exclusive.
Being ready for success. Workforce development. Marketing the downtown for investment. Mass transportation needs for rural communities to access the downtown's assets. Diversify housing options.
Affordable housing; overdevelopment of natural resources
Lack of affordable housing
Lack of financial support to develop businesses, their marketing and image. This would generate increased traffic in businesses and more people wanting to invest/live in the community. Businesses and tax payers for all the states needs.
Why is the state spending so much money supporting those that will never be viable tax payers? Why are we not investing in those that will create businesses that employ tax-paying people?
Rents are too damn high, wages are too low. Also, women are only making 60-70% on the dollar compared to men here. The housing wage needed is far beyond what people are actually making here.
Failing infrastructure, quality and affordable housing opportunities for median incomes, workforce development, municipal budgeting and cost sharing, lack of regional coordination
Enforceable and funded blight laws
A run-down downtown building stock that is more expensive to fix than it is worth.
Lack of housing in the village area. Lack of incentives to help grow businesses in the village area.
stop putting prisoners in Springfield for rehab, send them back to towns they came from
Lack of infrastructure in higher density areas. Lack of cohesive natural resource (forest and ag economy) protection.
Brownfield sites, limited opportunity for expansion in hill town divided by river.
Lack of consistent goals for Downtown between town government, RDC, Chamber and Downtown Program.
Funds
Barriers to multi-floor, mixed uses
Lack of funding for infrastructure for parking, water/waste water, stormwater.
Lack of housing opportunities, particularly in the lower to upper middle class range.
infrastructure limitations – roads and POTW
finding an alternative to SOV trip making
In our village centers, the lack of public infrastructure, especially water and sewer systems, absolutely prevents the type of compact settlement pattern that is a principal goal of the program. In larger communities (downtowns) the cost of redeveloping buildings/sites makes it difficult for investors to realize sufficient returns.
Business vacancies. Encouraging much needed new business back to the village for more community independence from "Big Box Stores" in other areas to continue our Vt quality of life and meet community needs. Again providing the services and meeting the needs of our local community. Revitalizing abandoned looking structures in the village. Improvement of existing housing.
Ensure state workers return to the state complex and/or expedite a reuse plan with tenants to occupy part or all of the complex. educate and implement alternatives to traditional parking regulations.
Developing our downtown area as an attractive place to live, work and play. We have some things in place to do this, but need a more comprehensive effort to get it done.

Sprawl is the biggest issue. We want to keep our town center compact.
Lack of wastewater infrastructure.
Lack of affordable and market rate housing and office space.
Finding viable options to revitalize old industrial buildings along Paren Creek. We don't want these structures to be abandoned and fall down. However, almost all of these buildings are not in the Village Center.
We did have one building -Macadoo Rugs- that is in the Village Center and was purchased by a developer who turned it into condos. I talked to him about about the Village Center Program and gave him written materials and a web link. I hope he used the program - but I never heard.
The cost to renovate existing buildings is too high. Property owners can not realize a return on investment in existing buildings.
Lack of flexible, affordable financing options for property and business owners/investors.
Vacancies and increased tax burden
Lack of town center.
Financing
The premise is that "growth" is desirable, or so I assume, because it is lumped with revitalization. The most important "issue" in planning for 20 yrs. down the road is incorporating sustainability and resiliency into planning. At some point effective planning will be focused more on trajectories and assumptions that are based on new information rather than traditional or historical experience.
lack of developable lots and height restrictions
With grand list stagnation (due to economy) and increasing cost of governance (health care, fuel, etc.) taxes are going up and services are being cut. The communities needs are increasing with infrastructure, alt. transportation, etc. and we have no way to pay. Without growth, a TIF is more of a liability than an asset. The growth center designation has to be an asset and not a cost liability with mandates as it is turning out to be (alt. transportation must be provided by X). Our communities best laid plans will not come to fruition unless we kindle public / private partnerships and work together with the State. How about an EB5 program for all growth centers?
Building improvements; distressed properties in Downtown; lame municipal support in undertaking revitalization projects.
Lack of developable space.
Lack of septic infrastructure in the village area
Provision of adequate parking.
MONEY, affordability - the limitations and problems of the property tax....
lack of housing, lack of water & sewer capacity in many towns, slow growth of household income, rising fuel costs, cost and complexity of local permitting
The potential for sprawl. We have many greenfields than could currently go either way. Downtown is alive but not yet thriving. VTrans intends to widen and straighten US 7 through downtown, which will destroy greenspace and likely hurt downtown businesses while promoting movement to new growth on the outskirts.
Lack of consensus regarding the importance of the downtown business district as the heart of the community. Money for building upgrades other than tax credits. Money for developing master plans that can be implemented. Money for full time director of the downtown programs.
Lack of parking
lack of affordable housing opp >\$300k
High taxes and impact fees. (DD is in public water & sewer districts)
Need more sense of ownership -
Allow for more ease in revitalizing neighborhoods
The system continues to favor cheap rural development over redevelopment of our historic centers. The State needs to keep rural Vermont rural and focus development in our downtowns and growth centers.
Scattered development that will not function under a fuel scarce environment
Lack of housing opportunities,

LOS standards in areas planned for growth,
water quality requirements
Infrastructure-water, sewer, stormwater
Growth of tax base to support infrastructure improvements.
I cover a whole county so it varies by town. Some need infrastructure. Many could use housing that's affordable for first time job seekers (e.g. - a big complaint for Goodrich in Vergennes is that it's hard for newly minted engineers, who make a decent salary, to find housing they can afford. It's NOT affordable housing that way it's traditionally thought of.)
Paying for necessary public infrastructure
Development of upper floors in downtowns, parking and housing.
Lack of market rate housing in district. Vacancies caused by absentee or unmotivated landlords. The codes regarding empty buildings in the district need to be very strict to deter ownership for investment only. Ownership in district should come with incentive to fully realize the property and keep it occupied.
Lack of workforce housing
Affordable housing suitable for young families in Montpelier
Increasing affordable housing stock and reducing municipal tax burden
Many of our opportunities lie outside any designated area. A much broader set of technical assistance/support from the state planning agency would help. Currently the vast majority of resources appear to be dedicated to the d/town program. Commercial decline, static housing market, housing quality, infrastructure limitations, lack of growth to fund change.
Infrastructure limitations combined with a lack of progressive local regulations-often encouraging sprawl and rural residential development.
Transportation alternatives to the automobile that are realistically usable by professionals.
High cost of developing in designated centers due to: contaminated site & clean up costs; inability to demolish older/obsolete structures and replace with less costly and more efficient buildings due to historic preservation requirements; and infrastructure limitations such as water, sewer, stormwater - high system costs and extensive permitting requirements
The biggest challenges for our village centers is typically limitations -- or total lack of -- offsite water and sewer.
Lack of incentives and creative solutions that support maintenance and redevelopment of multi-story historic buildings and adjacent neighborhood housing; therefore making it more profitable to turn it all into commercial space versus multi-use space
Business location in downtowns to create more "feet on the street" in support of downtown vitality and prosperity.
Housing, infrastructure limitations, cost of maintaining old historic infrastructure
Being across the Connecticut River from sales tax free New Hampshire.
Location of community centers in relation to Flood Hazard Areas.
Good jobs to allow people to stay in this region and to maintain a healthy community.
Maintaining/revitalizing existing downtown infrastructure to promote new economic growth and housing opportunities, utilities infrastructure and sidewalks to connect throughout the village/downtown areas
Infrastructure to support sustainable development and creating access to markets for businesses
lack of affordable housing and small area available with the historic districts
Making it happen (i.e. job creation, reinvestment in downtown, more localized economy) in order to better meet smart growth principles and address climate change challenges
We have lost our way in connecting education to success in life, and we've also lost our work ethic. Our population needs to find its way, and to connect education and hard work to success..
-Infrastructure limitations
-Lack of municipal financial planning (capital planning)
Lack of Design Review to control building form. New banal, auto-centric, strip-style development creates "ugly" places and does nothing to allow certain municipalities to take advantage of the state's #1 industry: tourism.

lack of water/sewer/transportation infrastructure in villages
Demographics. The difficulty in attracting/retaining middle-higher income people.
Lack of housing for young families and professionals

Question 12 - What types of training would make communities more successful in achieving the programs goals? (Open ended responses.)

Working with Historic Windsor's Preservation Education Institute to develop preservation skills in Vermont's construction workforce-- I am the executive director of the program. JLH
Organizations doing the work need help - too many demands on merchants and others who are asked to support the programs.
1) How to use available incentives and tools to achieve community goals.
2) Fitting model bylaws to community goals (don't just adopt a model).
3) How to achieve the types and mix of development that is needed for strong downtowns/village centers.
4) How to recruit businesses to your designated area (business contact, not infrastructure planning oriented)
5) "Maintenance Takes Work" for communities that say they simply want to protect what they have, rather than 'increase' development. These communities usually have 1-acre land use districts or zoning minimums in village centers.
Agani, a systems integration that, for instance, does not fail to generate a local bank or a grocery store in the habitat. Compact communities are an integrated system that is compact. No elements left out. No specialization in, for instance, art or hospitality corridors. Of course, old style mixed use with shops below and apartments above solved the problem of zoning implementation a long time before planning, as a professional discipline, went awry.
How to USE tools that are available. Currently, there is a lot of information on what the tools are available, but little on how to use them effectively.
How different pieces of a village or downtown fit together (parking, wastewater, roads/streetscape, buildings). There is a tendency to think only about specific properties. This does not work in a Village Center or Downtown.
Business recruitment for Downtowns and Village Centers. How to get business back from the 'Burbs.
Mandatory training for Planning Commissions
Reconcile the needs of economic vibrancy (congestion, pedestrians, development, growth) and Transportation standards (free flow traffic, wide turning radiuses, etc) and other conflicting regulation - such as environmental.
Our problem is not efficient local development review, but how to encourage our DRB to encourage more creative design in the initial review. They are not sufficiently familiar with these ideas.
Training in how to handle the one or two self appointed neighborhood advocates who oppose almost any change. These folks almost always come out of the woodwork...
Facilitated seminars that convene, confirm and document consensus between the private/volunteer factions and the Selectboard including the Town Manager
Creative, energetic, knowledgeable, and helpful planning and zoning staff
Small business support. Buy Local Programs are great idea, but need to be part of bigger picture of the community's businesses and assets. All important
"Model" bylaws are not a good way to characterize...each community is unique, needs to be treated as such and adopt what works for that place. "Example" strategies and bylaws is better way to describe
Design is critical. The key to design is walking backwards into the future. This enables us to see past decisions that have been successful in the form of spaces and buildings that have been cared for, cherished, over time: Robust planning and design decisions accommodate change and hence the passing of time.

Again these are thoughts regarding larger towns
All of the above are good the checked boxes in my opinion would have the highest return
All those listed above may apply, but training that preserves and helps communities through smart technology and ways to work toward a goal is beneficial
Create codes and provide funding to enact them. The costs need to be relative to the return. Vermont is a business and should be treated as such. Support the businesses and they will provide the jobs, that will pay the taxes, to pay the rest!
New media marketing.
Regional visioning
Working landscape recognition and tools/funding as valid economic development to address the '....separated by rural countryside' portion of the statute
Training that aligns the Downtown Designation goals with those of the Four Point Approach, so that actions work hand in hand.
Seed money to get the Downtown Programs off to an effective start. Money for staffing hours to be uniform and adequate to get the job done right!!!!!!
Don't know process well enough to comment on.
State Planning Office?
Market analysis
Innovative financing, TIF or some other type of financing tools are critically needed.
bylaw changes to increase the development of housing, particularly affordable
I'll leave it to others to say - I don't work with these programs regularly.
Training planning and regulatory staff at local and state levels regarding the realities of private development vs dreams and visions. Actual market demand. What will banks actually finance. Where do retailers (local or national, small or large) actually locate and why. Where do office users actually locate and why.
Training designed to address the Selectboard as the body that adopts the Town Plan, commits to infrastructure and especially meets as Road Commissioners making long term decisions that shape neighborhoods through road and sidewalk design, construction and maintenance. The relationship with VTrans needs to be revisited so that communities can see their visions materialize rather than be thwarted by an inflexible rural highway agency (not familiar with urban context).
All and none. What is important to recognize is that behavior does not follow a change in attitude (as we commonly suppose). Rather, a change in attitude follows change in behavior (or the reality on the ground).
support improved retail business practices
Most of our communities are very small. If we're going to include small villages in this program, it needs to recognize that in these small communities there is a very limited amount of money and time available to encourage revitalization. The problem with this program is related to a lack of outreach with regard to the benefits to private developers - many of them do not even know the tax credits are available to them.
While I believe in education, I do not believe training is the issue in this case. If the costs of the programs to municipalities outweigh the benefits offered, the programs do not work and no amount of training will fix that.